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DE RUEHIN #1624/01 1310902
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 110902Z MAY 06
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0134
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5199
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 6402

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 001624

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: As Taiwan dailies continued to center their reporting May 11 on President Chen Shui-bian's surprise stopover in Libya, coverage also focused on an ammunition depot blast in Taipei County Wednesday and local political issues. All major Chinese-language papers, with the exception of the mass-circulation "Apple Daily," front-paged Chen's surprise transit in Libya. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, ran a front-page banner headline that read "Bian Visits Libya and May Likely Fly to Lebanon." The newspaper also ran a banner headline on page two that said "With Bian's Visit, It Is Expected Taiwan Will Soon Set up an Office in Libya." The pro-unification "United Daily News" carried a news story on page three with the headline "Holding Hand with Laura Bush Using His Right Hand, While Shaking Hands with Qaddafi Using His Left; Bian [Uses] Two-Pronged Strategy to Create Diplomatic Exclamation Mark." The newspaper also reported on page three poll results which showed that 39 percent of respondents said they oppose Chen's decision not to transit the United States to and from Paraguay and Costa Rica, while 27 percent said they agree with it.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "Liberty Times" editorial called Chen's transit in Libya a rare diplomatic breakthrough, and an editorial in the pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" said the transit treatment Chen received is an embodiment of Taiwan's diplomatic predicament. An "Apple Daily" opinion piece said Chen's detour diplomacy showed that the DPP government is modifying its pro-U.S. line. An opinion piece in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" said Taipei should communicate more with Washington, while Washington should encourage Taiwan's efforts to establish good governance and political institutionalization. A separate "Taipei Times" commentary, on the other hand, said Chen has not only demonstrated his ability to deal with unforeseen contingencies, but also told both the U.S. and China that Taiwan will not be humiliated and that it is an independent nation. The "Black and White" column in the "United Daily News" asked whether Chen's transit of Libya is a diplomatic breakthrough or political suicide. End summary.

A) "Good Job, President A-bian!"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (5/11):

"... In fact, it is China which has blocked Taiwan's entire maneuvering space in the international community and put President Chen in an embarrassing situation. The pan-Blue camp did not dare to criticize China, which suppresses Taiwan; instead, it regards Taiwan's elected president as a foe. Such a weird mentality is unbelievable and fails to win the recognition of a majority of the Taiwan people. President A-bian transited Libya on his way home and would discuss with the latter about bilateral trade and an exchange

of offices. This is a rare diplomatic breakthrough. Chen will return to Taiwan today. He not only had to face China's suppression and the United States' cold shoulder during this trip, but will have to watch out for clandestine attacks from the pan-Blue camp. We thus want to cheer the President: Good job, President A-bian!"

B) "Tens of Thousands of Taiwan People Will Welcome President Chen at the Airport to Soothe the Mistreatment He Received and Support His Diplomatic Endeavors"

The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" [circulation: 100,000] editorialized (5/11):

"... The 'transit treatment' that the Taiwan president receives is actually an embodiment of Taiwan's predicament on the diplomatic front. The United States does not have any problem with Chen. Anyone who is in Chen's position today would receive the same treatment, unless it's those 'Chinese people' who claim to be 'pure Chinese' that kowtow to China like Lien Chan. Perhaps China will not interfere with or exert pressure on the United States [regarding his transits].

C) "Crashes between Taiwan and the United States Are Now Unavoidable"

Academia Sinica Institute of Social Science Assistant Research Fellow Hsu Yung-ming opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] (5/11):

"... Even though [Chen's] detour diplomacy has its flaws, which can be criticized, Chen's trip has also revealed some structural changes: First, the DPP is modifying its pro-U.S. line. No matter if it's Lebanon, Libya or the United Arab Emirates, they are neutral, medium-sized countries in their regions and are facing isolation like Taiwan. They are of geographical and strategic importance in their regions, but they are not close to the United States. They are unlike Taiwan's allies in Central America or the South Pacific, but are new targets for the island's strategic alliance. Also, in the wake of the cessation of the National Unification Council, the subject A-bian is wrestling with has become the United States. Beijing is hiding behind the scenes, expecting the day when Ma Ying-jeou becomes president. This will be a new challenge for the pro-independence faction in Taiwan, and the United States has become a big rock standing in the way of Taiwan independence. ..."

D) "Diplomacy, Not Politics, Needed to Handle US"

Liu Kuan-teh, a Taipei-based political commentator, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (5/11):

"... While it is essential for leaders in Taipei and Washington to improve communication and mutual trust, and avoid adding unpredictability to the relationship, it is also important for Taiwan to earn more respect and fair treatment from the US, regardless of China's influence. Nevertheless, the effort on Taiwan's side has not been good enough. The Bush administration also must avoid incorporating a double standard in its treatment of Taiwan in the course of engaging with Beijing. Bush should contemplate the degree to which his administration can keep a balance between safeguarding US interests and those of a democratic Taiwan, while at the same time engaging China and trying to mold it into a responsible stakeholder. Looking ahead, Taipei should communicate more with Washington, while Washington should encourage Taiwan's efforts to establish good governance and political institutionalization."

E) "The Country Must Stand Its Ground"

Chin Heng-wei, editor-in-chief of the "Contemporary Monthly" magazine, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (5/11):

"...Chen has not only demonstrated his ability to deal with unforeseen contingencies, but also told both the U.S. and China that Taiwan will not be humiliated and that it is an independent nation. Washington's rejection of Chen's request to transit through the US

mainland has highlighted the predicament facing Taiwan on the diplomatic front. If Chen rises to confront the US government, he is sure to deal a blow to US-Taiwan relations, but since Taiwan has gained the upper hand in this matter, we have to wait and see how the US will respond. Will the US still need Taiwan as one of the first island-nations in its chain of security off the East Asian coastline? Does it still intend to contain China's 'non-peaceful rise?' What will it see as the proper way of dealing with the Taiwan question? These are important issues that the US government and opposition will have to contemplate. ...

"Will Chen's indignation at the US spur the Taiwanese to seriously contemplate their future? Will it trigger a period of self examination in the US and cause the DPP to once again work to fulfill its calling to fight for Taiwan? Maybe this really is matter of a crisis offering new opportunities. This is exactly why Chen is staking everything on one throw."

F) " Qaddafi's New Friend"

The "Black and White" column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] noted (5/11):

"Chen Shui-bian, who said 'he will not be a lackey of the United States' has made friends with Libyan madman Qaddafi. ... The choice that Chen made was not only about the fact that he chose to transit Libya, rather than the United States, but he also pushed himself to the opposite side of universal values and international mainstream. Is this a diplomatic breakthrough or political suicide? ..."

YOUNG